

Vatican appoints new head of Jewish relations office

By Jonah Andel, *The Jerusalem Post*, 2 July 2010



Bishop Kurt Koch of Switzerland is to be appointed by Pope Benedict XVI to head the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Christian Unity – the office that oversees relations with Jews and non-Catholic Christians.

Koch will replace Cardinal Walter Kasper, who served in the position for 11 years, Vatican spokesman Fr. Federico Lombardi told the Catholic News Agency on Wednesday.

The American Jewish Committee warmly welcomed the appointment.

“Bishop Koch has a fine record of deep friendship with the Swiss Jewish community, as well as profound commitment to the singular religious and historical nature of the church's relationship with Judaism and Jewry,” said Rabbi David Rosen, the AJC's International Director of Interreligious Affairs. “We look forward to a close working relationship with Bishop Koch.”

B'nai B'rith paid tribute to the outgoing Kasper in a recent letter for being a true and faithful partner and for his “approach of constructiveness and healing” in his engagement with Jewish leaders.

“We have been privileged to know the warmth, openness and spirit that you have brought to your work,” wrote B'nai B'rith International President Dennis W. Glick, Executive Vice President Daniel S. Mariaschin, and Director of UN and Intercommunal Affairs David J. Michaels.

“Your leadership of the council has been characterized by great devotion – indicative of the profound importance of, and immense strides over the course of less than half a century in, the Catholic-Jewish relationship. Undoubtedly, your personal role in caring for and advancing this endeavor has been significant,” the letter continued.

B'nai B'rith expressed the hope that even in his retirement, Kasper's contributions would continue to provide an enduring foundation for the advancement of relations between Catholics and Jews.